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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether significant mean differences exist in standardized reading scores between a district that utilized a single basal series to develop reading ability and a district utilizing a tri-basal approach to reading. A cross-section of elementary teachers from two similar suburban school districts that adopted either a single basal program or a tri-basal program responded to questionnaires that sought information on the various approaches used in the classroom for the instruction of reading. Performance was measured by the Reading Comprehension scores on the Iowa standardized tests for five elementary school buildings in each of the school districts. Results indicated no statistically significant difference between the reading comprehension achievement among the randomly selected elementary students who receive reading instruction through the use of one basal reading program, versus students who receive instruction through a tri-basal reading program. (Two tables of data are included and the questionnaire is attached. Contains 68 references.) (RS)
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READING INSTRUCTION: USING A SINGLE BASAL READING PROGRAM VERSUS A TRI-BASAL READING PROGRAM

By
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Rec'd test
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the following study was to determine if there could be a significant mean difference in standardized reading scores between a district that utilized a single basal series to develop reading ability and a district utilizing a tri-basal series approach to teaching reading in an elementary school. It was hypothesized that the decision to conduct reading instruction in an elementary classroom, using one basal-reading series versus a tri-basal approach, would not result in a significant difference in the performance of students in similar districts.

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A STUDY OF BASAL READING PROGRAM SELECTION
AND POTENTIAL STUDENT PERFORMANCE

It is estimated the approximately 90% of the schools in the United States use basals as the major component of a reading program (Miller, 1986; Durkin, 1984). This figure indicates that many teachers rely heavily on the daily use of basals (Shannon, 1982). This fact, cannot be overlooked when faced with a decision concerning the selection of one series, or choosing to use more than one series within a school system. The use of an adopted program could extend throughout the first eight years of one's school experience, as well as remain the primary component of the curriculum for a span of approximately 5-12 years (Hallenbeck and Hood, 1981) . Reading instruction should be considered a schoolwide responsibility, consequently, districts need to provide a curricular framework for reading within which all teachers can work (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). The district should analyze possible materials, identify the overall needs of the student population, and establish districtwide goals. The review and selection of a basal series should be very carefully considered, for it is an expensive, time-consuming process and the outcome has a long-range impact on the student population.

Members of a district selection committee should relate student achievement with school policies and practices (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). The result of an investigation and evaluation may result in a set policy

created by a district. Administrators and teachers need to work together, share viewpoints and communicate with one another so that the selection of a single basal or tri-basal series can be the consensus of all district personnel (Shannon, 1982), while keeping in mind the fact that the overall goal is to create lifelong readers who have learned to comprehend that which is read.

While the selection of a basal reading program for a school system is a major commitment for a school district, there seems to be no uniform method of selecting basals (Clary and Smith, 1986). Little published information is available on the comparative benefits of utilizing a single series, as opposed to using a co-basal program or a tri-basal program. Since many districts lack any written policy regarding the selection of textbooks, committees are formed to determine priorities (Miller, 1982). The standards and requirements set by a district warrant a careful assessment and extensive research prior to finalizing any decisions. One district may select a single basal series in hopes of eliminating possible gaps that naturally occur when teachers use a variety of basal programs at the same or succeeding grade levels (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). On the other hand, a district might advocate a single curriculum goal, yet choose to use different basal series, assuming that the strengths of a variety of programs can further address the needs and

different learning styles of students within each classroom.

HYPOTHESIS

To provide evidence on the effectiveness of using a single basal reading series versus a tri-basal approach, the following study was undertaken. It was hypothesized that the decision of a school district to select one basal reading series versus a district selecting tri-basal reading series would not result in a significant difference in the performance of the elementary school children in similar districts.

PROCEDURE

A school district will usually make a choice between a single basal reading program versus a tri-basal reading program as a result of the goals and philosophy established within each district. A cross-section of elementary teachers from two similar suburban school districts who have adopted a philosophy
for instructing with either a single basal program, as opposed to a tri-basal program have been asked to respond to questions that will share instructional strategies and teaching styles for reading within each participant's

classroom. The student population, socio-economic backgrounds and class size was similar for all participating grade levels. A survey was created for the purpose of seeking input from the participating teachers. All instructors within each school building were asked to respond to the survey. Each building included classes for kindergarten through fifth grade. The staff for each school included classroom teachers, resource room teachers and basic skills teachers. Sequential levels of instruction are provided for each successive grade level, as established by the publisher of each reading program in use. The same published basal reading series had been adopted for use in both districts. Additional programs were used in one of the two districts.

To establish if there is a significant difference in reading comprehension between the performance of students who are exposed to a single basal program versus those who are exposed to a tri-basal program, a comparison of the IOWA test scores for each district was made. The test scores for the 1991-92 and 1992-93 school years were used for this study. Each district administered the same standardized tests during the third quarter of each of the designated school years. The actual weeks for administering the IOWA tests are within two or three weeks of each other. The presently used basal reading programs have also been used during the school years selected for

this study. The reading scores for students in grades two through five were used for the comparisons. A t test of differences between the means of the standardized test scores of the two districts were established, as shown below.

RESULTS

A random group of elementary teachers were asked to respond to a survey seeking information on the various approaches used within a classroom for the instruction of reading. The volunteers were teaching in two different school districts. One group of teachers worked in a district that is a proponent of using one publisher's basal reading program, labelled y in future discussion. The other district advocates the use of more than one basal reading program, labelled x for reference.

The results of the completed surveys produced the following information:

Survey Responses:

1. How many students are in your class?

   The smallest class enrollment for district x (multiple series) is 18, and the largest class enrollment is 26

students. The average class size has 21 students.

The smallest class enrollment for district y (single series) is 17, and the largest class enrollment is 23 students. The average class size has 20 students.

2. Do you have more than one reading group in your classroom?

Fifty percent of the classroom teachers in district x conduct reading groups on a regular basis. The other fifty percent primarily conduct whole group or whole language reading instruction.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y conduct whole group reading instruction.

3. How many reading groups do you meet with on a regular basis?

The classroom teachers in district x who conduct more than one reading group, have as few as two reading groups and as many and four reading groups. The average number of reading groups per classroom is three.

All classroom teachers in district y have one, whole class, reading group.

Individualized and supportive instruction is included in both districts, and is determined by the academic needs of a student.

4. Do you conduct whole class reading instruction on a regular basis?

Every classroom teacher in district x who instructs with more than one reading group, will also incorporate whole class reading instruction on a regular basis through novels and trade books. Thus, at some point, all classes in district x receive whole class reading instruction.

Every classroom teacher in district y conducts whole class reading instruction on a daily basis.

5. Is reading instruction conducted without the use of a basal reading program?

Twenty percent of the classroom teachers in district x now conduct whole language classes, and no longer

use any basal reading program. Eighty percent of the classroom teachers in district x instruct with a basal reading program.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y instruct with a basal reading program, thus, no class in the district receives instruction without a publisher's program.

6. Do all of the students in your class use the same basal reading materials?

Thirty percent of the classroom teachers in district x who conduct reading groups, use the same reading program for each group's instruction. Seventy percent of the teachers who conduct reading groups, use more than one reading program. The teachers use two or three different reading programs. The average number of publisher's programs used in each classroom is three.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y use the same reading program.

7. What basal reading series are you using in your classroom?

A. What series is used for whole group instruction?

All classes that use a basal reading program for whole group instruction in district x use the Silver Burdett & Ginn World of Reading Program.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y use the Silver Burdett & Ginn World of Reading Program.

B. What different series are used for each reading group?

The reading program most widely used in district x is the Silver Burdett & Ginn World of Reading. Additional series that are used include programs published by Houghton Mifflin, Scott Foresman and Heath.

8. Do you follow the suggested procedures that are provided in the teacher's manual?

All of the classroom teachers in district x who use a published basal reading program use the suggested format presented in the teacher's manual.

All of the classroom teachers in district y use the publishers suggestions that are presented in the teacher's manual.

9. Do you use the teacher's manual as a foundation for lessons, and then expand the format of the activity through your own preferred approach?

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district x who use the teacher's manual expand a lesson to incorporate a personal approach to instructing the students.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y expand a lesson beyond the teacher's manual to incorporate a personal approach to instructing the students.

10. Is a skills program taught within each reading group?

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district x who use a reading program include skills

lessons. All classroom teachers who instruct without the use of a basal include skills lessons within their curriculum. Ninety-five percent of these instructors will refer to a manual for specific lessons or instructional suggestions.

One hundred percent of the classroom teachers in district y include skills lessons through whole group instruction. Additional instruction is also provided for remedial needs.

Verification of elementary reading performance was acquired from the two suburban school districts. Five elementary school buildings were included for each of the districts. Performance was measured by the Reading Comprehension scores on the IOWA standardized tests for the 1991-1992 school year and the 1992-1993 school year. The mean scores for each grade level include the mean scores for the five schools per district. District x supports the philosophy of a tri-basal approach to reading instruction. District x also supports whole language classroom instruction, which occurs at the discretion and preference of some elementary teachers. District y conducts reading instruction with one basal reading program.

the following in statistical analysis, as can be seen in Table I. The greatest difference between the means of the 1991-1992 samples at each grade level was .2 grade equivalent, or 2 months. The t computed on each sample at each grade level indicates no significant difference between the means of each sample. Table II results, on the 1992-1993 sample, indicates similar findings with the greatest difference being .22, and no difference being significant.

Table I
Mean, Standard Deviation and t between the samples at each grade level for 1991-1992

Grade Level	Mean	Stan.Dev.	t	Significance
School District x-2	3.88	.24		
School District y-2	3.78	.18	.75	NS
School District x-3	5.02	.40		
School District y-3	4.82	.34	.85	NS
School District x-4	5.90	.35		
School District y-4	4.82	.22	.53	NS
School District x-5	7.1	.32		
School District y-5	6.9	.18	.96	NS

Table II
Mean, Standard Deviation and t between the samples of each grade level for 1992-1993

Grade Level	Mean	Stand.Dev.	t	Significance
School District x-2	3.96	.30		
School District y-2	3.96	.19	.29	NS
School District x-3	5.06	.29		
School District y-3	4.96	.29	.55	NS
School District x-4	6.16	.30		
School District y-4	5.94	.21	.41	NS
School District x-5	7.24	.27		
School District y-5	7.10	.20	.93	NS

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

An approach to the instruction of reading in an elementary classroom should consist of a program which encourages life-long reading habits. A selected program should teach reading for different purposes. They would include obtaining information for instructional purposes, reading for recreation and reading for personal enjoyment. An integrated program should include all components of language arts, address the different learning styles of students, and consider the developmental aspects of students on various grade levels. Students should be able to achieve a mastery of reading comprehension and basic

communication skills. A sequential K-6 program is also a relevant factor when determining the best approach to classroom instruction.

Many publishers offer a literature-based reading program which contains a variety of selections that include fiction, non-fiction, biographies, drama, and poetry. A reading series usually offers a balance of original classic literary pieces, and age-appropriate contemporary selections. If the format of a particular reading series addresses the philosophy and goals of a district, the result might be the district-wide selection of one basal reading program.

A district might choose to use one publisher's reading program within all of its elementary classrooms. This could be based on a philosophy that a published program can serve as a base for an integrated classroom reading program. A publisher's implemented program can incorporate teaching literary strategies and provide systematic approaches to reading. The provided format can address the various learning styles of all students within a classroom. One comprehensive reading program can be incorporated within a district to instruct students to sequentially and systematically acquire knowledge and enhance comprehension.

Not all districts agree on the most effective format for reading instruction. Some believe that a single basal

reading series is inadequate for the instruction of reading skills in a single classroom. One possible decision would involve the use of three different basal readers in each classroom. The three programs would be used for the instruction of basic reading skills. This choice could be based on the decision that no single basal reader provides an adequate teaching and learning framework for the children in a particular district. The availability of a wider range of reading materials can provide a greater variety of reading experiences. It can also be the foundation for addressing the learning styles of students in a manner that is more effective than using the materials available in a single reading program. Some educators believe there is a close relationship among the skills programs of the major basal readers. Consequently, a common experience would be achieved within each classroom. The availability of more than one reading program often provides a flexibility that will meet the various reading needs of students. The similarities among the programs will also ensure the ability for movement from one group to another without significantly jeopardizing the continuity of the skills program.

The philosophy and chosen approach for the instruction of reading has been reviewed in two similar suburban school districts. One district relies solely on instruction that is based on one publisher's basal reading program. The

second district uses a tri-basal approach to reading. The survey responses conclude that the majority of the students who use a basal reading program in the second district, use the same publisher's program as the neighboring district. The results of the surveys have produced an additional factor in the second district. The survey responses indicate that some elementary classes are no longer using any basal reading program. Their instruction is based on a whole language reading format. This added factor indicates a school policy that allows an instructional choice of materials that goes beyond the use of tri-basals.

The IOWA test scores have been used as a measure of reliable assessment for the elementary students in grades two through five. The scores have been compared for the past two school years. A review of the reading scores indicates that the performance for reading comprehension within the two districts has been remarkably similar. A mean has been established for each district and a t test has been used for each of the grade levels, per school year. The results have shown a minimal difference in the performance among the students during classroom reading when taught through more than one approach to instruction.

The data supports the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the reading comprehension achievement among the randomly selected elementary students

who receive reading instruction through the use of one basal reading program, versus students who receive instruction through a tri-basal reading program.

BASAL TEXTBOOK SELECTION: RELATED RESEARCH

The desire to effectively learn the skill of reading has been a part of formal, as well as informal, teaching for centuries. For example, the early American colonists believed in the importance of teaching literacy skills. The colonial schools used a single-page hornbook as a text, focused on oral performance and rote memorization, and emphasized religious training (Venezky, 1987). The predominant reading text in America soon became the *New England Primer* (Ford, 1899), which originated in Boston in the form of a child's shirt-pocket-size primer (Venezky, 1987). *McGuffy Readers* were published between 1836 and 1844. The content of these readers were motivated by the social concerns of the time as much as by the need to appeal to a particular audience for educational concerns (Venezky, 1987). Basal reading series have increased in popularity since that time and soon became a predominant approach to reading instruction in this country (Smith and Saltz, 1987).

There are some similarities between basals today and the earliest readers. The consistency is evidenced by an emphasis on a conservative representation of society's view of appropriate reading material (Venezky, 1987). Changes in society have forced the textbooks to move along with the influencing factors during a given period of time. The shift to the concept of gaining meaning from print evolved in the late eighteenth century. According to Venezky, the

shift from preaching adult concepts to promoting interest through child concerns is one of the great revolutions in the history of the basal reader. Content has continued to change during the twentieth century, with an emphasis being placed on "good literature." According to Venezky (1986), this literary emphasis continues up to the present day. As time progresses, reading materials and techniques have changed, and an understanding of the reading process has also changed (McCallum, 1988). Society's influence has also had an impact on the content of basal readers. For example, different lifestyles and socioeconomic backgrounds have influenced the inclusion of minorities, women and the handicapped in reading selections (McCallum, 1988).

Basal reading series have been the foundation of a school's reading program for more than a century. The program is primarily composed of a series of readers that are written at successively more difficult levels. They are characterized by their controlled vocabulary and the development of a skills program in word attack methods and comprehension. The basal readers are accompanied by a teacher's manual and workbooks for practicing skills (Bush and Huebner, 1970; Chall, 1983, 1967; Durkin, 1987). A basal reading program can provide easily identifiable storylines, a variety of children's literature, a procedure for comprehension and word analysis techniques, and the convenience of having the same book for each child on a

particular reading level (Russavage, Lorton and Millham, 1985). One basal reading series can represent a total reading program in a classroom. An alternative would be to use a combination of more than one series within a school program. Many school systems in this country do not question if basals should be used in the classroom. Instead, the question usually asked is, "Which basal series (plural) should we buy?" (Bush and Huebner, 1970).

In our society today, basal readers determine the content and structure of reading instruction in many elementary classrooms (Dixon, 1979). Frequently, the selection of a basal reader amounts to implementing the reading curriculum. This could occur because a chosen series, or multiple series, will influence the type of literature read by the students. A reading program will also influence skills that will be developed and practiced in the classroom (Miller, 1986). Due to the comprehensiveness of a basal reading program, there is often little time for other kinds of reading activities in the schools where basals have been adopted (The Commission on Reading, National Council of Teachers of English, 1989). The importance of these readers cannot be minimized, for the majority of direct classroom instruction involves textbooks. Some estimates indicate that interaction with textbooks account for as much as 75% of classroom time (Goldstein, 1978; Farr and Tulley, 1985). The majority of

this time is devoted to using a basal reader (Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987). The impact of textbook instruction for reading is significant(Mason and Osborn, 1982). It has been estimated that most instruction occurs on a daily basis through the use of a basal reader (Miller, 1986; Durkin, 1984; and Shannon, 1982). The high rate of basal use would indicate that reading textbooks influence the way reading is taught. This fact cannot be overlooked when faced with a decision concerning the selection of one or more reading series. Consequently, the careful selection of these textbooks is very important.

Basal reading programs do have limitations, and will not necessarily solve the problems associated with the overall effectiveness of reading instruction. At the same time, basal series can partially fill the gap between research and practice by translating the results of research into instructional practices which meet the possible constraints under which teachers operate (McCallum, 1988). A basal series can be viewed as a coordinated program that can address a wide range of reading related skills, ranging from decoding to literary appreciation. The program can provide on the job training, as well as a management system for an instructor. Both possibilities would allow for the coordination of reading instruction, step-by-step introduction of skills, and the ability to evaluate a student through the use of

criterion referenced tests.

The adoption of most textbooks is determined by district approval, and should be based on the results of careful research. The textbook adoption process has been identified as the crucial issue in determining textbook content, organization, and the timing of revisions (Farr and Tulley, 1989). Most of the textbooks used in the U.S. schools have been reviewed and selected by textbook adoption committees. In this country, 22 states have a mandated statewide adoption policy, while 28 states are not bound by the same dictates (Farr and Tulley, 1989, 1985; Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987; Farr, Tulley and Rayford, 1987).

State level adoptions can have a greater influence in determining the content of basals than the non-adoption states. This is evidenced by the fact that publishers use the statewide adoption states as key marketing targets (Farr and Tulley, 1989, 1985; Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987; Farr, Tulley and Rayford, 1987). The strong influence of state committees, as well as district adoption committees, can have an impact on the materials a publisher chooses to print. Adoption committees can provide a means to bring about a change in the content of a basal textbook (Farr and Tulley, 1989). Strategies can be employed to improve reading instruction. For instance, publishing companies are interested in learning about the educational

policies and practices of a school system (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985), and they will pay close attention to the decisions of the adoption committees (Farr and Tulley, 1985). For instance, the appearance of more award winning literary selections in basal readers can be traced to the requirements of textbook adoption committees (Comas, 1987).

Many researchers have found that the more organized and readable a text, the more students will learn from it (Osborn, Jones and Stein, 1985). Text structure is an important factor to consider when selecting a reading series. Reviewers should evaluate the publisher's use of vocabulary, content, and skills development. They should also analyze the environment and background factors of the students' lives when determining the most appropriate selection of reading materials for a district. Teachers should have access to the best possible materials to help them in their task of educating young people (Osborn, Jones and Stein, 1985). This places a significant burden on an adoption committee, for they need to determine effective reading materials that will benefit the students in the classroom.

The selection of a basal reading series can be a time consuming, expensive process that has a long-range impact on students. Although the textbooks students use have been analyzed rather extensively, there has been little research about the specific materials and the quality of the

textbook program (Osborn, Jones and Stein, 1985) Nor has there been much research indicating a uniform method for selecting basals (Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987; Clary and Smith, 1986; Miller, 1986). The majority of the gathered data is primarily based on the results of surveys that attempt to document committee structure and organization (Educational Research Service, Inc., 1976; Institute for Educational Development, 1969; Kreiner, 1979; Stewart, 1980). Much is known from these studies about how committees are organized, but little is known about how the committees actually function (Farr, Tulley and Powell, 1987).

In addition to statewide adoption committees, other groups throughout this country have a point of view that can impact the selection of a basal series. They include district selection committees, local reading specialists, reading educators, teachers, parents students and local boards of education (Clary and Smith, 1986). Frequently, committees are formed to set goals, review materials, and consider the needs of the students, staff, administrators and the community. An effective basal reader selection process is one which results in teachers identifying materials that help bring about the type of reading instruction they seek in their classrooms (Tulley, 1991). Since the format for adoption can vary, some professionals believe selection procedures need to be more objective,

uniform and complete. Frequently, committees are formed to determine priorities. Members of a committee need to establish a criteria for adoption that can be done in a fair, impartial way (Clary and Smith, 1986). Decisions should be based on some degree of objectivity that can be ruled by predictable judgments (Miller, 1986). Standards cannot be uniformly established on a national or state level because the needs of each district can vary. Farr and Tulley believe that the backgrounds and experiences of teachers and children throughout any state in this country will differ significantly. Consequently, some researchers believe that a local school district will need to determine which basal reader, or readers, will best meet the needs of the students in their school system.

Unfortunately, some students fail to profit from various approaches to reading instruction. Perhaps it would be advantageous for an adoption committee to also study reading textbooks from an instructional, rather than a social, perspective (Bernstein, 1985). Flaws in basal series need to be addressed and improved by educators in the hopes that the publishers can be influenced to alter their format. For instance, if the language in an elementary selection is stilted and choppy, a committee might re-examine the readability formula used for the text, sentence structure, story grammar and vocabulary limitations. The results of an evaluation could be shared

with representatives from a publishing company. Teaching approaches and techniques for skills instruction should also be evaluated. The results of this study can also be shared with publishers. It is quite possible that educators and representatives of adoption committees may disagree on ways to improve textbooks. But, in general, they are asking publishers to pay more attention to the organization of the books, the quality and level of questions, the reinforcement of new vocabulary and concepts, the quality of literary selections in readers, and the depth of coverage of important topics (Bernstein, 1985).

Textbook difficulty can have an impact on the reading development of a student, and is a concern of educators as well as publishers. A suitable reading level is of great importance when striving to have students derive meaning from a text. A study conducted by Chall and Conard (1991) reports that students' judgments of their ability to read the text and their comprehension of it corresponds with the difficulty of the passages they have read. Many textbooks are aimed at students of average reading ability, at the same time, a majority of these textbooks are inappropriate for students in the lowest quarter of reading ability (Chall and Conard, 1991). If low achievers are faced with frustration, it may be due to overly difficult basal materials (Durkin, 1990). Factors such as these can

influence the decision to use a single basal reading series, versus a co-basal or tri-basal approach. A possible advantage to using more than one basal series, might occur when students are having difficulty with a specific skill or the strategies formulated as an approach for instruction. An alternate basal series could be used to alleviate this problem while addressing the particular learning styles of certain students (Durkin, 1990).

Making a qualified choice regarding the use of a single versus multiple basal series should evolve from the research conducted by a district's adoption committee. Participating on a basal series selection committee is demanding, yet members willingly volunteer (Hallenbeck and Hood, 1981). Some research indicates that more teachers participate in the selection process today than ever before (Bernstein, 1985). Volunteers often believe that the time spent on evaluating a series is an investment in the future. This could be due to the fact that a series could remain in use in a district for many years. Some participants might be unclear as to the exact role or nature of the proposed task when reviewing different basal series (Courtland, 1983). Consequently, committees should set some standard guidelines for the evaluation process. Some parameters might include: determining the role of administrators, staff and the Board of Education; evaluation of the districts' focus on curriculum; selecting

a single basal, co-basal or tri-basal adoption; and seeking to identify and meet the needs of the student population. The committee should also identify various ways to compromise and balance the goals that have been established. It is important to remain focused and keep the objectives of the task in mind. For the most part, those responsible for a textbook adoption are satisfied with the committee process and the final materials that are chosen (Bernstein, 1985).

A committee task force should examine the program objectives, content, scope and sequence, teaching and learning strategies, evaluation procedures, physical characteristics of a text, supplemental components and cost (Middelton, 1987). Committee members should recognize that selecting a textbook is not the same as selecting a curriculum, for a single textbook series should be *part* of the curriculum, not the *total* curriculum (Farr and Tulley, 1985). When evaluating different reading programs, reviewers should keep the philosophy and district curriculum in mind, and attempt to relate them to the types of materials that are available. One of the goals might be to formulate a policy that will promote continuity and consistency in the teachers' expectations and practices (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Such considerations often create a formidable task. Approaches to addressing the established goals can vary widely. They might include a

survey of various texts, evaluating a presentation given by the publishers, piloting textbooks in selected classrooms, seeking input from students, or using a skill tracing method for evaluation (Champion, 1986; Cosendine, 1987; Cotton, 1987; Muther, 1984/1985). It is the opinion of some educators that a skill trace is less opinionated than usual checklist procedures (Cotton, Casem, Kroll, Langas, Rhodes and Sisson, 1988). It can be considered an objective method of reviewing a series because examples of a skill and related strategies for teaching it can be reproduced for all grade levels presented in the reading series. The results should show how the skill is developed throughout the program (Cotton, Casem, Kroll, Langas, Rhodes and Sisson, 1988). The adoption committee can determine the goals and guidelines to use as a parameter for the research. All potential investigations should be documented by using criteria sheets to evaluate textbooks (Farr and Tulley, 1985). These evaluation sheets can list the factors that the task force considers important in the selection process. All responses should be written (Hallenbeck and Hood, 1981). The results can be used as a cross-reference with previous district policies, presently used district guides, curriculum policies, and implemented programs within the school system. They will also assist the members of the committee when formulating decisions that could lead to the most appropriate selection of a

reading program.

Socioeconomic backgrounds and the academic learning styles of students can be compared with levels of achievement and goals within a district. As a result, a district may formulate a specific policy. For example, one system might select a single basal series to eliminate gaps that naturally occur when teachers use a variety of basal programs at the same or succeeding grade levels (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Using a basal throughout a school can establish a consistency and sequence for reading instruction (Smith and Saltz, 1987). The use of the single reading series may also provide coordination for the curriculum. Such coordination would create a structure for the reading program within which all teachers would work, and it would also ensure the continuity in the program (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). On the other hand, a district might advocate a single curriculum goal, yet choose to use different basal series. Multiple series can address the need for more challenging, as well as less challenging, reading materials. Teachers frequently realize that their students have diverse ability levels that can be influenced by different family backgrounds, interests and motives for learning. Students may use visual, auditory or kinesthetic modes of learning to complete an activity, and some will use a combination of learning approaches. It should be the goal of every teacher to try to meet the unique needs of

each student. If learning does not occur using one teaching technique, then another approach may be needed. Classroom teachers should attempt to analyze the needs of the students when developing teaching techniques for a flexible use of the reading materials (Russavage, Lorton and Millham, 1985). The strengths of a variety of reading programs could further address the needs and different learning styles of students within each classroom. Different learning styles and the specific needs of students should be a factor that determines the type of basal adopted for a school system (Smith and Saltz, 1987).

It is important to remember that the goal of reading is to construct meaning. This can be achieved through an interaction between the reader, the text, and the context of the reading situation (Valencia and Lipson, 1990). Since students have different ability levels, one should realize that reading performance can vary for any given activity. For example, a student could have difficulty reading one type of text, but not another (Valencia and Lipson, 1990). Such factors are relevant to decisions that will determine the use of one, or more than one, reading series.

The student is not necessarily the source of a reading problem. Reviewers should also consider the research findings that indicate contextual factors also contribute to literacy and can enhance learning or lead to

difficulties (Valencia and Lipson, 1990). During an evaluation process, the committee should consider an assessment of the elements of the context that are likely to impact the performance of a student. The evaluation of the program context should include information about the materials and tasks being used by the students (Valencia and Lipson, 1990). The results derived from a series should be matched to the learning styles of the students. Gaps in a reading program can be minimized when a series is well matched to the students' learning styles and presented at an appropriate reading level. Achieving this goal is preferable to just matching all of the students of the district to one format for learning.

Classroom instruction should be directed toward accommodating the differences in the students' abilities to learn how to become independent readers. The wide variety in student performance supports the need to consider instructional approaches other than whole class instruction (Durkin, 1990). A teacher should aim to provide suitable instruction for all students, so as to avoid both frustration and boredom. It is possible that some students will not be able to succeed with the publisher's recommendation for a grade-level basal reader (Jongsma, 1990). There may be a need to create ability groups within a classroom, for students need to be challenged without creating levels of frustration (Durkin, 1990; Jongsma,

1990; Smith and Saltz, 1987). Ability grouping has been characterized by the formation of instructional groups, consisting of children being assigned by their teacher's assessment of their reading achievement (Barr, 1989; Flood, Lapp, Flood and Nagel, 1992). Grouping children by ability for reading instruction is a common practice in many elementary schools. Creating ability groups presumably allows for the provision of instruction at an appropriate level for the students in a particular group (Logan, Rux and Paradis, 1991). This has been a primary strategy for reading instruction for many years. Some researchers believe that it will be easier for a teacher to target the appropriate instruction necessary for addressing the learning styles of students if there is a reduction of the range of abilities among each group of students (Hereford, 1993). However, not all research supports the concept of ability grouping (Hereford, 1993; Flood, Lapp, Flood and Nagel, 1992). In order to make a qualified decision, a district would have to review the available data when formulating a policy about approaches and corresponding materials to be used for the instruction of reading.

The reviewing committee should analyze a publisher's ability to meet the diverse variables that could exist within an entire district, as well as a single classroom. If the conclusions for the use of one series are not satisfactory, then a district might continue its

investigation of programs, and possibly consider more than one series. However, if there is flexibility within the structure of one program, a single basal series can be used as a base for classroom instruction (Smith and Saltz, 1997). A classroom teacher will then be able to follow a basal series while effectively addressing the needs and learning styles of the students. If a good balance can exist between the teaching of skills and the amount of reading practiced on an appropriate level, then one publisher's program could successfully satisfy the goals of a district.

Reading instruction should be considered a schoolwide responsibility, consequently, districts need to provide a curricular framework for reading within which all teachers can work (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Many teachers may believe their school administration requires the use of basal materials as the major component of the reading program (Durkin, 1990; Russavage, Lorton and Millham, 1985; Shannon, 1983, 1982). The results of this pressure can have an impact on classroom instruction and preclude innovative instructional decisions that are based on individual student need (Russavage, Lorton and Millham, 1985). Some administrators believe that all teachers should use the same materials to maintain continuity in the reading curriculum throughout the school district (Shannon, 1982). This belief supports the

philosophy of using a single basal series in a school district. Other administrators profess that the basal material's instructional powers are the primary reasons teachers rely on the commercial materials (Shannon, 1982). Advocates of this philosophy might support the selection of co-basal or tri-basal reading programs as an appropriate approach to addressing the varying needs and learning styles of the students within a classroom. When making a decision regarding the use of one reader, or more than one reader, administrators and teachers need to work together. Shannon believes it is important to share viewpoints and communicate with one another so that the selection of a single basal or tri-basal series can be the consensus of all district personnel.

After examining the research, it becomes apparent that there are many facets involved in making a selection of reading materials for a school district. There is no uniform method to follow when selecting a basal program. There is also no clearly defined evidence to support a position when considering the use of a single basal reading series versus using a co-basal or tri-basal approach to reading instruction. Each school district might benefit from its own research when formulating decisions that impact the student population within their own school system. Decisions could depend on the district's philosophy toward education, the goals set forth by the

curriculum, and the socioeconomic strengths and weaknesses of the community. The selected reading materials should assist in bringing about the type of reading instruction the teachers, administrators and community seek within the classrooms of the schools. When a school system uses it's curriculum policy as a guide, the decision to use one basal series, or more than one basal series, can be determined. A final decision should be based on an instructional approach that would create the best possible means of meeting the needs of the students. Each adoption committee can analyze the publisher's ability to meet the diverse variables that could exist within their district. The outcome of these decisions will determine the appropriate use of a single basal reading program versus more than one basal reading program.

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RELATED RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How many students are in your class?

2. Do you have more than one reading group in your classroom?

   Yes No

3. How many reading groups do you meet with on a regular basis?

4. Do you conduct whole class reading instruction on a regular basis?

   Yes No

5. Is reading instruction conducted without the use of a basal reading program?

   Yes No

6. Do all of the students in your class use the same basal reading materials?

   Yes No

7. What basal reading series are you using in your classroom?

   A. What series is used for whole group instruction?

   B. What different series are used for each reading group?

8. Do you follow the suggested procedures that are provided in the teacher's manual?

   Yes No

9. Do you use the teacher's manual as a foundation for lessons, and then expand the format of the activity through your own preferred approach?

Yes No

10. Is a skills program taught within each reading group?

Yes No